

Message Text

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SUBJ: FLANDERS VOTES

REF: ANTWERP 294

1. WITH MOST OF THE VOTES NOW IN, THE RESULTS IN FLANDERS OF THE 1977 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION SHOW AN INCREASE OVER 1974 OF FOUR PERCENT IN THE POPULAR VOTE FOR THE FLEMISH SOCIAL CHRISTIANS AND AN INCREASE OF ONE PERCENT FOR THE SOCIALISTS. THE VOLKSUNIE SHOWS A LOSS OF ONE-HALF PERCENT AND THE LIBERALS A SURPRISING LOSS OF OVER THREE PERCENT.

2. AS ALMOST EVERYONE PREDICTED, PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS AND HIS FLEMISH SOCIAL CHRISTIANS RECORDED A CLEAR VICTORY AT THE POLLS IN FLANDERS AND POLITICAL OBSERVERS TAKE THIS TO BE A RESOUNDING VOTE OF CONFIDENCE FOR TINDEMANS HIMSELF AND FOR HIS BRAND OF CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY. HE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY AGAIN BE ASKED TO FORM THE GOVERNMENT.

3. ALSO ROUGHLY AS EXPECTED, THE VOLKSUNIE FELL VERY SLIGHTLY IN NUMBER OF VOTES AS COMPARED TO THE 1974 RESULTS. SOMEWHAT MORE SURPRISING WAS THE SLIGHT INCREASE IN THE FLEMISH SOCIALIST SHARE OF THE VOTE. (THE CONGEN HAD PREDICTED A FLEMISH SOCIALIST
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LOSS.)

4. THE REAL SURPRISE IN FLANDERS, HOWEVER, WAS THE SERIOUS SETBACK SUFFERED BY THE FLEMISH LIBERALS WHO HAD BEEN TINDEMANS PARTNERS IN THE LAST GOVERNMENT. INITIAL EXPLANATIONS FOR THIS LOSS FOCUS ON LIBERAL WILLY DE CLERCQ'S ROLE AS FINANCE MINISTER IN THE OUTGOING CABINET BY WHICH HE BECAME THE SYMBOL OF SEVERAL

NEW TAXES, INCLUDING THOSE IN THE EGMONT PLAN, THAT PARTICULARLY AFFECTED THE LIBERAL PARTY'S TRADITIONAL CONSTITUENCY IN THE MIDDLE CLASS.

5. IN TERMS OF FLEMISH PARLIAMENTARY SEATS (AND EXCLUDING BRABANT), ONLY FOUR SEATS IN FLANDERS WILL PROBABLY CHANGE HANDS. THE FLEMISH SOCIAL CHRISTIANS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY GAIN THEM ALL AND THE VOLKSUNIE AND THE LIBERALS WILL PROBABLY EACH LOSE TWO. NO CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF FLEMISH SOCIALIST PARLIAMENTARY SEATS IS EXPECTED.

6. (N.B.: THE FLEMISH SOCIAL CHRISTIANS ARE LIKELY TO GAIN ANOTHER TWO PARLIAMENTARY SEATS FROM THE LIBERALS IN FLEMISH BRABANT FOR A TOTAL GAIN OF SIX FOR TINDEMANS' PARTY AND A TOTAL LOSS OF FOUR FOR DE CLERCQ'S FLEMISH LIBERALS.)
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